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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1794  
INFO USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
AMEMBASSY HANOI  
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 003699

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER GIVEN COMMAND CONTROL  
OVER ARMED FORCES

1. CLASSIFIED BY ROBERT C. PORTER, DEPUTY CHIEF  
OF MISSION, PHNOM PENH; REASON 1.5 (B).  
DECLASSIFY NOVEMBER 6, 2005.

2. (C) SUMMARY. THE RECENT APPOINTMENT OF THE  
CO-DEFENSE MINISTERS AS DEPUTY COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF  
PLACES THE MILITARY UNDER TIGHTER CIVILIAN  
CONTROL, BUT HAS DISPLEASED CHIEF OF THE GENERAL  
STAFF GEN. KY KIM YAN, WHO UNTIL NOW HAD BEEN ABLE  
TO IGNORE THE DEFENSE MINISTERS WHEN IT SUITED HIS  
PURPOSES. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, CO-DEFENSE  
MINISTER GEN. TEA BANH, A STRONG SUPPORTER OF  
SECOND PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN, HAS BEEN TAKING AN  
INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE ROLE VIS-A-VIS THE RCAF.  
TO FOSTER UNITY AND COUNTER ANY BAD FEELINGS,  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT CHEA SIM INVITED  
SENIOR RCAF, POLICE AND DEFENSE MINISTRY PERSONNEL  
TO A "NATIONAL DAY" BASH TWO WEEKS BEFORE NATIONAL  
DAY. NONE OF OUR CONTACTS BELIEVES THAT KE KIM  
YAN WILL ACT ON HIS UNHAPPINESS; WE AGREE WITH  
THAT ASSESSMENT. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) SEVERAL RCAF CONTACTS HAVE CONFIRMED THAT  
THEN-ACTING CHIEF OF STATE CHEA SIM RECENTLY  
APPROVED A PROPOSAL FROM THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS  
APPOINTING THE CO-MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AS DEPUTY  
COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF. THE CHANGE, WHICH IN THEORY  
WENT INTO EFFECT ON OCTOBER 11, PROVIDES THE  
MINISTERS WITH THE AUTHORITY TO GIVE ORDERS TO  
CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF KE KIM YAN, WHO FORMERLY  
REPORTED DIRECTLY TO THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS IN  
THEIR CAPACITY AS COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF. THE PRIME  
MINISTERS MADE THE CHANGE IN PART BECAUSE THEY  
WANTED A CIVILIAN TO BE IN COMMAND OF THE MILITARY  
WHEN THEY BOTH TRAVELED ABROAD (AS THEY RECENTLY  
DID DURING THE UNGA).

4. (C) A VARIETY OF SENIOR CIVILIAN AND MILITARY  
OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US THAT KE KIM YAN IS UNHAPPY  
WITH THE CHANGE, IN PART BECAUSE HE DOES NOT GET  
ALONG WELL WITH CO-DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL TEA  
BANH (CPP). MAKING MATTERS WORSE FOR KIM YAN,  
ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS, TEA BANH HAS BECOME  
INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE IN DEALING WITH THE RCAF IN  
RECENT WEEKS, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF INCREASED  
BACKING FROM SECOND PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN;  
MEANWHILE, THE FUNCINPEC CO-DEFENSE MINISTER  
GENERAL TEA CHAMRATH HAS GONE INTO REPOSE. KE KIM  
YAN BELIEVES HE HAS BEEN PUT INTO A DIFFICULT  
POSITION BECAUSE, IN THE PAST, HE WAS ABLE TO  
STRADDLE SUCCESSFULLY THE FENCE BETWEEN THE  
LEADERSHIP OF THE TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES.

5. (C) WHEN CHEA SIM WAS MADE AWARE OF KE KIM  
YAN'S UNHAPPINESS, HE DECIDED IT WAS TIME FOR A  
PARTY TO SOOTHE HARD FEELINGS AND FOSTER A SENSE  
OF UNITY. REACHING FOR AN OCCASION TO HONOR THE  
ARMED FORCES, HE HELD A PREMATURE NATIONAL DAY  
CELEBRATION MORE THAN TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE REAL  
EVENT AND INVITED THE TOP MILITARY, POLICE, AND  
DEFENSE MINISTRY LEADERSHIP. OVER 200 RCAF AND  
POLICE GENERAL OFFICERS ATTENDED, INCLUDING KE KIM  
YAN AND THE CO-MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND INTERIOR.

IN HIS SPEECH, CHEA SIM REVIEWED PROGRESS TO DATE  
IN UNIFYING AND RESTRUCTURING THE ARMED FORCES AND  
POLICE AND URGED BOTH THE MILITARY AND POLICE TO  
CONTINUE THEIR COOPERATION.

16. (C) COMMENT: THE MOVE IS A WELCOME CHANGE  
BECAUSE IT PUTS THE MILITARY UNDER GREATER  
CIVILIAN CONTROL AND WILL HELP IMPROVE  
COORDINATION BETWEEN THE RCAF GENERAL STAFF AND  
THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, WHICH SOMETIMES HAS BEEN  
LACKING. NO ONE WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN BELIEVES  
THAT KE KIM YAN WILL ACT ON HIS UNHAPPINESS IN A  
WAY WHICH WOULD BE POLITICALLY OR OTHERWISE  
DESTABILIZING. WHAT IT MAY DO, HOWEVER, IS MOVE  
HIM CLOSER TO CO-INTERIOR MINISTER SAR KHENG TO  
WHOM HE HAS BEEN CLOSE PERSONALLY FOR SOME TIME.  
IT IS CURIOUS THAT, THROUGH TEA BANH, PRIME  
MINISTER HUN SEN WOULD TAKE ACTIONS WHICH WOULD  
ALIENATE THE ARMY, FROM WHICH HE HAS FREQUENTLY  
CLAIMED TO DERIVE CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT. WE WILL  
BE COMMENTING SEPTTEL ON HUN SEN'S INCREASING  
RELIANCE ON THE MILITARY POLICE AND HIS INTEREST  
IN CREATING A SPECIAL UNIT TO ACT AS HIS  
BODYGUARDS.

TWINING